

Ways to Writing

Purpose, Task, and Process

SECOND EDITION

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Preface

It has been gratifying to see the success of the first edition of *Ways to Writing*. The text has been received and used with an enthusiasm that confirms our original premise in writing it: Students may best understand the writing process when it is presented through a series of integrated activities that take them through each stage of the process. In this second edition, the premise and hence the essential character and structure of *Ways to Writing* have not changed. The book continues to offer a coherent, unified sequence of specific writing assignments intended to show students how their decisions as to purpose, invention, audience, arrangement, revision, and style are crucial to the effectiveness of their writing. The changes that we have made, in response to extensive feedback from students and reviewers, are intended to improve upon and refine both individual assignments and the sequence as a whole. We believe that in making them we have strengthened the book dramatically. The most important of them are as follows:

1. Chapter 1 has been thoroughly revised to give more emphasis to the journal as a semester-long project. Different ways of starting, keeping, and thinking about a journal have been given prominence, and a wealth of student and professional examples has been added.
2. Chapter 6 has also been thoroughly revised to clarify for students the act of explanation and its role in their movement from the more personal, expressive and exploratory writing of the earlier chapters to the more public, expository writing of the later ones. Discussions of exemplification, generalization, and public voice lead to an assignment in which students are asked to draw conclusions about the significance of a theme they have traced in one or another aspect of the media.
3. Chapter 9 on writing about literature has been replaced with an entirely new chapter on critical thinking. Students are invited to use critical thinking skills in order to synthesize disparate arguments made in professional

- essays on a controversial issue and then develop their own theory about the issue.
4. New professional models have been added to every chapter of the text, so that now at least two appear in each chapter. In some chapters, both professional essays are new, as are many of the student essays.
 5. The easy-reference Handbook of common grammatical and mechanical problems, included at the end of the book, has been expanded with more examples and new summary exercises.

We have made other changes to clarify concepts or facilitate the use of different parts of the book. Those familiar with the first edition will, we hope, find that the major change is simply that *Ways to Writing* is now more effective in initiating students to the process of writing college-level essays. For those who are using the text for the first time, a few more comments about its rationale and organization may be helpful.

In their effort to write more effectively, our students have taught us the urgency of starting with what the writer already knows. They remind us that even very good writers do not use personal experience or expressiveness merely as a springboard to writing about something outside themselves, namely the world of ideas or abstractions, but that their work is in the fullest sense “expressive” of their own voice and vision. Thus, in Chapters 1–3 we emphasize the value of the journal, of free writing, of a first-person perspective on things, ideas, and institutions. Because we want our students to become more conscious of themselves as writers writing, we guide them first to what they can express or explain with the power that comes from having experienced the subject directly.

With increased ability to write about their perceptions, students can do better with the complex demands of expository writing. In Chapters 4–6 we ask them to examine and explore their environment and values by gathering, analyzing, and interpreting information. In Chapters 7–9 we introduce them to library research, methods of argumentation, and critical thinking.

The central focus of our book is the task that sets each writing assignment in motion. We lead the student writer through a series of prewriting activities that culminate in the preparation of an essay. To this end, we have placed the task for each chapter after the prewriting sections, which suggest ways of generating ideas for completing a task as well as of analyzing audience considerations. The sections following the presentation of the task guide the writer through the various stages of writing the essay. They encourage students to apply what they have learned in the prewriting sections to the task at hand, and they suggest patterns of arrangement, present professional essays based on a similar task, and offer the rough draft of a student essay in fulfillment of the task.

Concluding each chapter is a “Focus” section stressing matters of style and

structure: a "Rewriting" section suggesting different approaches to revising, along with a revised version of the student essay in the chapter; and "Becoming Aware of Yourself as a Writer," a series of questions on the chapter's writing process that encourage students to become more conscious of what they do when they write.

We have found many advantages for the student in this task-centered approach. First, the student benefits from a "hands-on" approach that provides concrete, specific assistance for an actual writing assignment. Second, the task itself enables the student to draw from a broad range of experiences and, through a sequence of self-designed strategies, to arrive at a conclusion that follows naturally from the student's own cognitive processes. Third, and probably most important for the student writer, each task builds on the skill and awareness acquired in completing the previous tasks. Beginning with expressive writing, the writer is encouraged to move beyond narrative writing to tasks requiring more complex analytic and critical thought. In fact, it was our desire to help students to make this transition that drew us to this cumulative, task-centered method.

We believe our task-centered approach will also be of practical advantage to the instructor, who can relate the writing strategies to the actual assignment at hand. The many rhetorical exercises and examples of readings should also help the instructor focus on the problems that often arise in discussions of "good" and "bad" writing. The task format yields even greater benefits, we believe, in assignments that require the student to absorb, evaluate, and synthesize reading material—assignments such as the research paper or the essay exam. Here the student is guided through the difficult stages of writing such essays, from formulating the shaping idea to revising the rough draft.

The authors feel that both student and teacher will benefit from the unity of design and purpose that we have created in each chapter. Of course, no approach to teaching writing can or should presume to be prescriptive or definitive in its methods, and we encourage the users of this text to choose what they think useful and to modify what they think does not respond expressly to the needs of their own students. The "Generating Ideas" and "Audience" sections are not bound to the process of writing on a particular task and can be used in other chapters or in class activities devised by the instructor. An instructor can quite easily restructure some of the tasks to suit a particular expressive or expository demand. Although the chapters cover most of the customary writing assignments undertaken in college writing classes, an instructor need not use every chapter, for each individual chapter provides the student with parallel purposive activities. One of our intentions has been to encourage instructors to modify or augment our tasks and activities with their own.

Ways to Writing offers instructor and student concrete direction through the process of writing but without the reductive "by-the-numbers" approach of many basic writing texts or the exhaustive minutiae of the all-encompassing rhetoric. By engaging student writers in activities that are both interesting and

immediately useful, we hope to give them ways to gauge their own progress in expressing themselves effectively and to direct their vision beyond the classroom to the world that they have already experienced and observed.

We have also prepared an instructor's manual that introduces the pedagogy of the text, offers suggestions for approaching the tasks, includes a twelve-week and fifteen-week syllabus, and lists sources for the instructor who seeks more information on both traditional and current approaches to the teaching of writing.

The authors wish to express their admiration for, and indebtedness to, James Moffett's *A Student-Centered Language Arts Curriculum: K-13*. We have drawn from Moffett's work the central role of the task in the formulation of a writing consciousness, as well as his important contribution to the study of how and why students write, and of the interplay between "concrete" and "abstract" as the basis for the development of sound thinking and writing. We are also most obviously indebted to James Kinneavy for his analysis of the different underlying purposes in writing; expressive, referential, and persuasive.

The authors wish to thank the many students who over the seven-year gestation period of this book have good humoredly submitted themselves to the trials and errors that we have put them through while developing both approach and materials in their classrooms. We wish to thank particularly the students whose work—both in rough and more polished stages—we have used as models for each task: Carolyn Bunkley, Italo Ferrari, Liliana Gonzalez, Janice Gordon, Kathy Greene, Lisa Halpin, Hennessy Levine, Virginia McLaughlin, Marc Pressman, Patricia Sadhoff, Anastasia Schneider, and Alyce Zimmerman.

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L. C. S.
D. S.
A. H. L.

To The Student

By now you must have arrived at some definite view of yourself as a writer. After many years of writing in one school or another, you probably have concluded that you are either a “good” or a “bad” writer. Those words are written with quotation marks around them for a specific reason: They really have no meaning. Or at least no meaning that can be of any usefulness in evaluating yourself as a writer. The words *good* and *bad* imply some kind of absolute standard of judgment—perhaps the grade you received on a high-school essay exam or a report on gerbils you prepared in the third grade. But they just won’t do for an evaluation of writing once you become aware of all the complexities involved in any act of written expression. This textbook attempts to take those complexities and arrange them into a coherent pattern so that they can be studied and perhaps even mastered.

But writing, as you know, is not plane geometry or biology or accounting. When you write, you don’t necessarily begin at the beginning. You write because you have something to communicate, and often only after you have already begun to write do your thought processes go to work to determine the form that your writing will take. Our textbook is based on the assumption that you will write more effectively if you clarify your purpose in writing and if you are aware of how the ways you develop ideas, as well as what your audience expects, can give direction and weight to your writing. We have arranged the text in a way that we feel will increase your skill in these elements of communication.

The central focus of each chapter in *Ways to Writing* is a specific writing task. In the earlier chapters, the tasks are more personal: You may be asked to evaluate something you have learned about yourself by keeping a journal, or something you have learned about your attitude toward a place by visiting and studying that place. In the latter chapters of the book, the tasks become more analytic, and you will be asked, for example, to explain why an idea that you hold is sensible or to argue why a position that you take is valid. In completing each task, you will be invited to employ a different way of developing ideas.

and you will be asked to write for a different kind of audience. To guide you through these tasks, we have arranged our text so that the completion of a writing assignment is supported on one side by general prewriting activities and on the other by prewriting, writing, and rewriting activities directed specifically to the completion of the task at hand.

Beginning each chapter is a "Purpose" section that provides a brief explanation of the writing aim for that chapter. Following this is a section called "Generating Ideas" that offers ways for you to get started writing. Some ways are traditional; others are relatively new. Some require no deliberation; others demand logical concentration. You will find that you can apply these procedures in writing to the tasks in other chapters. They form a kind of cumulative reserve to draw on when you need to develop ideas for an essay.

Another important consideration before you begin writing is, naturally enough, your audience. You don't usually write in a vacuum; you write to and for others. Thus you need to know who your readers are, how to interest them, what kind of stance you need to take toward them. Clarity is important, but more than that is required to move an audience, to make it see what you want it to see. Through discussion and exercises, we hope to make you more conscious of the crucial role that an audience plays in determining the shape of your writing.

After announcing the task in each chapter, we guide you through the writing of an essay, showing you how to use the prewriting techniques, stressing the importance of a shaping idea, suggesting ways to arrange your discussion, directing you to the structural and stylistic characteristics of effective writing. As you will notice in your own writing, revision is an indispensable follow-up to any writing effort. By studying the rough drafts of other students, as well as peer evaluations of their work, you will become more aware of the contribution that these activities can make to your own writing.

Finally, we ask you some questions to encourage you to think about your own writing process, to become aware of the tentative, provisional nature of all writing as the unfolding of a mind. Clearly, this is not the same thing as counting the errors in each of your papers and then trying to find the mathematical formula for determining a grade. If we succeed in conveying to you some of the satisfaction you can derive from expressing yourself effectively to others through the act of writing, we will have accomplished our purpose in preparing this text.

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